

# **DNA- Deconstructing Native Affairs: New Equations**

Jacqueline Kehilwe Manyapelo

(MNYJAC004)

A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the award of the degree of Masters of Arts (Theatre & Performance)

Centre for Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies, Faculty of Humanities

University of Cape Town

2019

Supervised by Professor Mark Fleishman

## **COMPULSORY DECLARATION**

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from

the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signed by candidate
---------------------

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This has been both an incredible and challenging adventure. Without the encouragement of the following people and organisations, I would not have had the strength to continue. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Mark Fleishman. His guidance, support and patience, including the paternal role he played during these two years, I will cherish for a lifetime. To Dr. Sara Matchett, Enkosi Ma for the counsel. I am most grateful to the support of the Institute for Creative Arts, the Mellon Foundation, the University of Cape Town and the Centre for Theatre, Performance and Dance Studies in the pursuit of this degree. To Mrs Manyapelo, my mother, I thank you for birthing, rearing and loving me. To my family, husband and son, this journey would not have been possible without your love, patience and support - Ke a leboga. To all my friends and colleagues, I thank you all for the conversations, advice, and of never tiring of listening to my woes.

## CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION &amp; RATIONALE</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>TRACING MY DANCE DNA</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Part 1. The Architecture of My Practice (Training at Jazzart Dance Theatre)</b>	<b>40</b>
1.1 Technique classes and Improvisation	40
1.2 Productions	47
<b>Part 2. Between Form and Freedom: Analysis of solo dance performances and</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>projects</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>LAST SECTION - NEW EQUATIONS</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Satisfaction Index at Artscape 2015</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>63</b>

## ABSTRACT

This study is an exploration of the articulation of my artistic voice or performance signature. It employs two methodologies, autoethnography and Practice as Research to investigate the practice of my artistic creations as a solo dance-maker. It utilises concepts such as the Batammaliba's anatomical and metaphorical approach to architecture, Sankofa and decoloniality to frame the investigation. My first solo work, *Satisfaction Index*, is a point of departure for this analysis. The study then proceeds to engage with works created during the pursuit of this master's degree over the past two years. In the discovery of my work, DNA and ritual feature to further construct the artistic voice or performance signature that I seek for the articulation of my rebranding as a soloist.

“History is not simply about *interpreting* various dead artifacts, looking at past events as safely in the past. It’s about inventing strategies for the present” (Nealon & Giroux, 2002:112).

## INTRODUCTION & RATIONALE

The purpose of this research paper and the pursuit of this degree has always been to reach an articulation of my artistic or performance 'signature'. A trial and error process towards this articulation has seen me going back to the title of my investigation, *DNA* -

*Deconstructing Native Affairs: New Equations*, and analysing each of the words. *DNA* understood in a basic scientific, but essentially metaphorical, manner and how this affects us or not in our lived experience/s. *Deconstructing*, both as a form of analysis and as understood in Derrida's theories of deconstruction. John D. Caputo, quoting Jacques Derrida, comments that,

The very meaning and mission of deconstruction is to show that things—texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size and sort you need - do not have definable meanings and determinable missions, that they are always more than any mission would impose, that they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy. What is really going on in things, what is really happening, is always to come. Every time you try to stabilize the meaning of a thing, to fix it in its missionary position, the thing itself, if there is anything at all to it, slips away. (VP 117/SP 104 in Caputo, 1997:31)

*Native*, as an inhabitant of this place I find myself in and as that which is inherently belonging to me. *Affairs*, in relation to my concerns or my events, as in the performance works that I have created in the past two years, and not of the romantic kind. Finally, *New Equations*, articulating my future prospects with the aim of creating a final thesis production that speaks to these terms both artistically and academically. But how did I get here? A practising artist in a university, conducting research?

Post my departure from Jazzart Dance Theatre<sup>1</sup> in 2014, I was spiralling. I was in a

---

<sup>1</sup> Jazzart Dance Theatre is one of the oldest Contemporary Dance companies in South Africa. [www.jazzart.co.za](http://www.jazzart.co.za).

crisis. Who was I outside of Jazzart after 14 years of being there? Approximately ten months after resigning as Artistic Director of Jazzart Dance Theatre, I found myself questioning what my plans would be regarding my future career in the arts. Without employment, frustrated, I set out to create my first solo work, *Satisfaction Index*, to ease my irritation. It was an attempt at rebranding myself and distancing myself from my status as Jazzart dancer, or Jazzart artistic director. This expedition as solo dancer and independent choreographer in the latter part of the year 2014 became a playground and experimental space for articulating my performance style. The first installment of *Satisfaction Index* was staged in a visual arts gallery, Greatmore Studios Trust, in Woodstock, Cape Town, on 24 and 25 April 2015. The life that it then grew into proved to be a complex journey both in the unpacking of its style and its presentation. The playground became bigger and more involved, more experimental with a professional production finish. It motivated me to utilise ideas not seen through whilst directing and choreographing at Jazzart. *Satisfaction Index* was birthed out of a need to find a happiness within me and a healthy relationship with my work, as I had ended the previous chapter in not so savoury a manner. Once I had taken the production to the Harare International Festival of the Arts, from 28 April to 3 May 2015, I realised that *Satisfaction Index* could have a longer life span. This life span also came with varied feedback from those who saw it - "It needs a director", "Jackie you're a dancer, you need to dance". Apart from these responses, I was sitting with my own difficulty trying to understand what it was I was doing with this dance theatre production; what was I trying to say? In its next iteration I complied and danced. There *was* a certain 'release' in the dancing (not as in the dance technique term), or was it perhaps a crutch? (Just cloud their thinking with your dancing and maybe they will not ask too many questions). My own questioning persisted though. At times the non-response from certain people in the industry, people



whose artistic views I respected, drove me into a further slump of uncertainty and insecurity. This did not curb my will to continue performing the work as I needed to earn a living and understand what I had created. The more I performed it, the more the responses grew and the more my confusion grew. Watching *Satisfaction Index* at Youngblood Africa, writer, lecturer and cultural analyst, Ashraf Jamal, provided this response in his *Sunday Times Lifestyle Magazine* review:

This interpretation may seem cynical, and yet, as the drama unveils, and as we move from vignette to vignette, tableau to tableau, it becomes increasingly evident that a terrible lack haunts the dance-drama's desiring machine. Shifting from the balcony at the Youngblood opening, Manyapelo descends the stairs, her body spastic, pneumatic, wracked, but these physical movements, characteristic of Manyapelo's style, are not manifestations of an exorcism, but the breakdown of a machine - the movements of a creature that knows itself to be as mortal as it is machinic- a cyborg. (Jamal, 2015:5)

I reached a time when I thought I should just continue performing this work and let others write about it, express their observations. In turn, I thought I could capture these expressions to try and formulate my thinking and hopefully this might assist me in understanding my choreographic choices. Tracey Saunders, one of the two people to write about *Satisfaction Index*, had this to say in her online review upon watching a restaging at Artscape Theatre Centre, October 2015:

The dance piece is an exploration of herself as a dancer, choreographer and black woman. Performed against the backdrop of seven virtues - chastity, temperance, charity, diligence, patience, kindness and humanity, each vignette provides a window on her world and her multifaceted character. The varied choreography is a result of her quest to explore different ways of presenting dance theatre. (Saunders, 2015)

Saunders understood an element of what I was doing, or at least, understood that I was on a search for something. It pleased me to see this in writing especially since I did not have a one-on-one interview with Saunders prior to her seeing the piece. I was indeed exploring the many hats that I have carried in my career, all within the space of one production.

It was at this time that I identified what would be a recurring concern. Apart from *Satisfaction Index* being a project that was aimed at establishing myself as a soloist, I could not be concrete regarding its build. Which dance techniques were deployed? What impact did the dance have, if any, on myself and the audience? Conceptually, I had started off with the idea of the Seven Virtues as opposed to the often utilised, Seven Deadly Sins. Was I still on this trajectory? Where was I now *after* creating the movement? At the end of 2017 I had the opportunity to perform *Satisfaction Index* at the Institute for Creative Arts (ICA). For this occasion, I decided to focus on one of the elements of the production. My choice was to centre it around the stories of the women represented in the piece. Women's rites of passage were a natural landing spot and an agreeable point of departure when asked for a synopsis of the work. The insistent enquiry, including other factors such as being asked to perform on different platforms and the desire to be eloquent in the description of this work, did not desist. The enquiry brought me back to reworking my solo and I still have not been able to let go of this investigation. With this state of confusion and insecurity, I began to lack confidence in my abilities. Feeling worthless formed part of the decision that led me to the university and leant focus to my research. I needed the space to think, explore, dig deeper and build myself up again.



Satisfaction Index at Artscape 2015

## METHODOLOGY

The first methodological approach that I employ for this investigation is autoethnography. In a journal article titled, 'Autoethnography: An overview', Carolyn Ellis, Tony Adams and Arthur Bochner define autoethnography as "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)" (2011: 273). The first references to autoethnography correspond with the rise in identity politics. In 1975, Karl Heider used the term 'auto-ethnography' to describe a study in which cultural members give accounts about their culture (Adams, Holman Jones and Ellis, 2015:16). Adams, Holman Jones and Ellis go on

to say that:

During the 1980s, researchers in sociology, anthropology, communication, performance, and women's and gender studies began writing and advocating for personal narrative, subjectivity and reflexivity in research, though they did not often use the term "autoethnography" [...]. [S]cholars began to apply the term 'autoethnography' to work that explored the interplay of introspective, personally engaged selves and cultural beliefs, practices, systems and experiences. (Adams, Holman Jones and Ellis, 2015:16&17)

The decision to use autoethnography stemmed from the desire to articulate my artistic signature or voice. Realising that I needed to analyse my personal experiences in terms of my dance and performance aesthetic, this method of research felt the most appropriate or comfortable in order to reach a better understanding of who I am in my practice. Ellis, Adams and Bochner continue to explain that, "A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product" (2011: 273).

Using the formula above to understand autoethnography, I propose the etymology of autobiography as: graphy - to systematically analyse, auto - a personal experience, bio - of life or the living. Or we can use the Merriam-Webster definition which is, "the biography of a person narrated by himself or herself" (autobiography. In *Merriam-Webster.com* 2019). To understand the definition of biography and ethnography respectively, and *sans* the prefix auto, I look to two academics, Raymond Williams for ethnology/ethnography and Birgitta Svensson for biography. In his book, *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society*, Williams suggests that:

Ethnology, ethnography, and various associated words, date from the 1830s and 1840s, probably from German influence, and the early relations with ANTHROPOLOGY (q.v.) are complex. The scientific uses are now specialized areas within anthropology, typically ethnography ... for descriptive studies of customs and ethnology for theories of cultural development. (Williams, 1983: 119)

Svensson explains biography as “a way of constructing coherent pasts that make sense in the present” (Svensson, 1997:73). Williams, in his 1983 revised edition of the book, provides me with the understanding of auto-ethnography as a self -study of cultural development theories, and Svensson offers auto-biography as constructing the self’s logical past or pasts to make meaning in the present. Therefore, to make meaning of my present cultural development, I set out in my research to construct a logical past for my practice by analysing my dance background and that of the company I was trained in, by means of looking into three areas, namely: technique classes, improvisation sessions and the productions mounted solely by the company and/or in collaboration with other arts institutions. Reflecting on my experiences at Jazzart Dance Theatre in the 14 years spent there, I desired to reach an outcome that would assist in the articulation of my artistic thoughts and choices, through the interrogation of my training and performance. This systematic analysis became the foundation of my research practice. My aim in pursuing an auto-ethnographical style was to, hopefully, as per my aspirations, provide a sense of clarity with regards to the architecture of my practice, distinguish form and freedom within my practice, and provide direction to the idea of inventing ritual. I have come a long way in this work and though these answers might not be completely reached, I am at the very least pleased with the attempt. It has given me a frame within which to operate.

Autoethnography is *qualitative* method—it offers nuanced complex and specific knowledge about *particular* lives, experiences, and relationships rather than *general* information about large groups of people. Qualitative research focuses on human intentions, motivations, emotions, and actions, rather than generating demographic information and general descriptions of interaction. (Adams, Holman Jones and Ellis, 2015:21, emphasis in original)

The concentration on the self - in thoughts, feelings, inspirations and in doing, has been therapeutic in my investigation. I will explain this further below. However, before I explain

the therapeutic process, I would like to bring attention to one other term which is linked to this type of research methodology and that is anthropology. Ernst von Glasersfeld observes that,

Observer-observed problems have surfaced in social sciences with the emergence of the notion of understanding. In anthropology, for example, it has been realized that it is a sterile undertaking to analyse the structure of a foreign culture, unless a serious effort is made to understand that culture in terms of the conceptual structures that have created it. (Glasersfeld, 1995: 149)

When I joined Jazzart in 1999, contemporary dance was foreign to me, to my body. Familiar to me was *IsiPantsula* and *Umxhentso* which were dances that I grew up practising, socially.<sup>2</sup>

It is along this line of thought and in agreement with the above quote that, since the time I spent at Jazzart, I, (my body), has become no longer foreign to the contemporary dance style as I have come to understand it. I agree with Deborah E. ReedDanahay when she opposes the opinion by Daniel Bertaux and Martin Kohli that “life stories are no longer fashionable” (1984:231 in Reed-Danahay, 1997:1).

My choice to work with the autoethnographic research method is, to my excitement, unearthing a past that I am now realising has been lying dormant. The culture and structures of the dance training programme and company that I grew up in were re-awakened by this research exercise. Since I was nurtured by this organisation as an artist, my analysis of it *cannot* be sterile or unfruitful or indeed ‘unfashionable’. The retelling of my story in this undertaking is of importance and will hopefully be contributory to the dance industry, as a body of knowledge for artists, dance-makers and or disciplines, but most importantly, to me, as a soloist under construction.

Drawing on my personal, practical knowledge in dance training and dance performance to find my artistic voice may seem an immodest exercise, but nothing could be further from the truth. It has been dis-stressful. The process of going back in time, digging

---

<sup>2</sup> *Isipantsula* is an urban dance form that grew out of the South African townships, whilst *Umxhentso* is a traditional dance of the Xhosa people of Southern Africa.

deep into my body's memory, and the struggle to articulate these experiences, has not made this journey an easy one. I am still coming to terms with who I am, what I am made of, with regards to my way of life as an artist, a mother, an individual and inhabitant of this city, country, continent, and this world. To articulate or express oneself is not an easy task and one that requires a great amount of introspection. Self-examination can yield great rewards, but it can also be detrimental to one's emotional and psychological wellbeing. This process of trying to find equanimity draws me closer to the artistic movement of Expressionism in the hopes of finding a healing, understanding and connection to my artistic work. In *50 art ideas you really need to know*, Susie Hodge describes the formation of Expressionism as follows:

The term Expressionism is thought to have been coined by the Czech art historian Antonin Matejcek (1889 - 1950) in 1910, when he described a new art style that appeared to be the opposite of Impressionism. According to Matejcek, Expressionists sought to express inner feelings rather than the impartial external appearances of the Impressionists. Two years later, in 1912, the term was used again by the writer and editor Herwarth Walden (1879 - 1941) in his magazine *Der Sturm* ('The Storm'). The word Expressionism was used to describe the moods, feeling and ideas that some artists were conveying through vivid, harsh intense and distorted images. (Hodge, 2011: 100)

The challenging of traditional styles of art in Expressionism and the concern with the discomfort and anxiety with the modern world are areas of interest and interrogation for me and this personal journey of my artistry. "A new art style", coined "to express inner feelings", these phrases were ideas that inhabited my creation space during my first solo and phrases that I wish to always refer to in the process of my work. The discomfort and anxiety but also the modern world, and my experiences of my self in that world, is I assume, what Reed-Danahay is trying to explain when she writes, "One of the characteristics of an autoethnographic perspective is that the autoethnographer is a boundary-crosser, and the role can be characterized as that of a dual identity"(Reed-Danahay, 1997:3). Crossing the

boundary both artistically and personally, and the attempt to express my most inner feelings through this process, is what I continue to experience on a daily basis. Not only do I have to exercise this in my work, but it also has to permeate into my personal life as well if I am to see a difference within my artistry. The following section covers a second method that I have observed manifesting in other areas of my life and not only in my professional work.



Satisfaction Index at Artscape 2015

The second research method that I employ in this enquiry is Practice or Performance as Research (PaR) or Artistic research. From this point on and for ease of reading I will use the



abbreviation PaR when referring to this method. Robin Nelson explains PaR in his book,

*Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances:*

PaR involves a research project in which practice is a key method of enquiry and where, in respect of the arts, a practice (creative writing, dance, musical score/performance, theatre/performance, visual exhibition, film or other cultural practice) is submitted as substantial evidence of a research inquiry. In contrast to those sceptical scholars who dismiss, or look down upon PaR as insubstantial and lacking in rigour, I recognize that PaR projects require more labour and a broader range of skills to engage in a multi-mode research inquiry than more traditional research processes and, when done well, demonstrate an equivalent rigour. (Nelson, 2013:9)

My practice is dance, and where I was trained, at Jazzart, we learnt through doing, through dancing; “(...) a kind of knowing-in-doing which is at the heart of PaR” (Nelson, 2013:9).

Later in collaborations with companies such as Magnet Theatre (which I will briefly mention later under Productions), a more formal research element was introduced to the work and this was a new way of working that either excited us or seemed to be a hinderance. By excitement or hinderance I mean that one could view this form of recording or remembering as a pleasure or an annoyance as we were unfamiliar with the writing down of notes about what we were learning. We stored everything in our bodies, not on paper and or other material such as photographs. This was indeed an unusual way for us to practise our dance, one that required us to work on more than just the physical level, that required us to engage our intellect. At this point, I would like to focus on a South African perspective of PaR through the experiences of Veronica Baxter, she writes, “In South Africa the Practice as Research (PaR) methodology is quite new, and is not officially recognized yet by the academy” (2013:163). I am now realising that, Baxter’s observations come eleven years after we, Jazzart’s trainees, were introduced to the PaR way of working and it is now more evident to me how progressive the approach we were exposed to was at the time. I am pleasantly surprised to realise that we were engaging with this method of working long

before it was officially recognised in this country. A point to add here as well is the way in which both these organisations, Jazzart and Magnet, in my opinion, sought to redress the imbalances of the educational landscape of the time through the performing arts. As Themba K. Fassie, brother to the late “Madonna of The Townships” Brenda Fassie<sup>3</sup>, comments in a collection of essays on Brenda Fassie edited by Bongani Madondo: “The apartheid regime distorted all capacity for rational thinking in black folks” (Fassie, 2014:50). The term *previously disadvantaged youth* was an expression that we as dance students were all too familiar with in 2002. We understood it to mean where we came from, the townships, our financial conditions, and our impoverished education system, the remnants of Bantu education. Through this new way of working we were offered artistic training and research to empower ourselves. In the above quote, Fassie (the brother), was referring to his mother’s “lack of interest” in developing her daughter, Brenda’s academic learning which he implies is an effect of the apartheid system on the country’s people of colour. The slow development in the education of the people of this country is somehow still felt. As Baxter comments, “South Africa is a society in transition, and is particularly rich with possibilities for the PaR methodology because of the national project of reconstituting South African identities, the extreme socio-political and economic difficulties, and the move to restore memory through performance” (Baxter, 2013:163). The restoration of my memory of what I experienced in my early days of training and now, through this degree, is not easy to explain. In the early days, the exercises administered to us as a tool to source stories and choreographic material encouraged confidence in the way that I viewed myself and my surroundings. An example of this is being given a disposable camera to capture where we

---

<sup>3</sup> Brenda Fassie, (1964-2004) was a South African Afropop musician fondly referred to as the “Queen of African Pop”, “Ma-Brrr” and “Madonna of The Townships” by her fans.

came from, both in the form of living surroundings and family. This created, in my understanding, a sense that my directors, choreographers and teachers were interested in where I grew up and had spent the majority of my time before meeting them. I developed a certain confidence. During this degree, my memory is slowly being restored due to the exercise of remembering by going back to a physically demanding time filled with insecurities, achievements, and elation. Similarly, in the writing of this autoethnographic work, the act of remembering is extensive, and this act has been steadily ushering me into a place of restoring my identity as a performer. I have certainly developed in a positive direction in the two years of this degree, and it is partly through engagement with the PaR method. Six years ago, Baxter had a hunch that PaR exceeded other methodologies in servicing the theatre-making community in South Africa based on the way that South Africans are orientated, this with respect to their experiences of knowledge both as individuals and as a shared society (2013:164). She refers to Walter Ong and the term 'secondary orality', to further support her idea:

To a great extent most of South Africa is based within 'secondary orality', that is, a society that is literate but which has strong connections to orality. A feature of secondary orality is the reclaiming of the pre-literate society's interconnectedness as community. (...) Part of Ong's analysis involves the way in which knowledge is constructed through a collective process, where feedback is immediately provided through dialogue. This new knowledge is collectively owned, but also allows for individual interpretation, flexibility and contextualization; it transcends time and place, but also allows for situational and abstract or analytical thinking. (Baxter, 2013:164)

The way in which Jazzart and Magnet facilitated the process of constructing or generating material for productions was of a joint effort. In one exercise we had to bring in our personal stories and share them with each other. I will not describe in detail the actual process, but I would like to bring to attention the qualities earned during this undertaking. We had to enquire from parents and relatives about our family origins so as

to bring them in for sharing with the whole team or parts thereof. In the telling and retelling of each other's stories more curiosity would be awakened, sometimes due to being inspired by one's colleagues and how far they could trace their family trees or sometimes through the questions that they would pose to you about yours. Whilst being amazed at how far other people could remember or how much information was shared with them by their families, you had to come to terms with the reality of your story, or stories. You could embellish them if you chose, though this was not an instruction, to give them a new life, to make them more interesting. You could also learn, or experience a better understanding and appreciation of your circumstances based on the information that you had researched, gathered and offered to the group. Henk Borgdoff's articulation of PaR below provides me with finer insight regarding this method. Borgdoff explains,

Clearly research in and through artistic practices is partly concerned with our perception, our understanding, our relationship to the world and to other people. Art thereby invites reflection, yet it eludes any defining thought regarding its content. [...] This makes artistic research an open undertaking, seeking deliberate articulation of unfinished thinking in and through art. (Borgdoff, 2011:45)

This statement by Borgdoff acknowledges both methods of study that I have chosen for this investigation of my artistic voice and signature: placing the self at the centre of the enquiry, being one of the features of autoethnography, in combination with the comprehension of the world and how we relate to it, as a feature of PaR. The aim is to rewrite the self through the act of remembering engaged in through practice. In the following section, I will be looking at a number of frameworks that will assist me in organising my thoughts and ideas around and for this enquiry.



Satisfaction Index at Artscape 2015

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

The conceptual frameworks that have informed my study emerge largely from my African context. The first framework is Architecture, both in its broad sense, and more specifically, Batammaliba architecture. At the time of performing *Satisfaction Index* at the ICA, with the idea around women's rites of passage, I came across the West African Batammaliba

(Tamberma, Somba) people of Togo and Benin, and the concept of 'cicatrisation' (to be discussed further on). The Batammaliba are known as master builders. What excited me about these builders is the way that each house is designed with human anatomy in mind. The windows are the eyes, the granaries the stomach, the drainage pipe the penis, a terrace that appears as a piercing hole representing the human fontanel and cranial opening. Water to wet the earth for building is seen as blood and this mixture is seen as the flesh of the house. As in the process of making a child, both male and female Batammaliba are present in the creation of the house. The architectural expertise of the Batammaliba provided me with a frame or container within which to operate in the exploration of my work. The axiom 'Houses are Humans' from the Batammaliba continues to be a predominant feature in the rationale of this research. According to Suzanne Preston Blier, "Batammaliba men and women, in viewing their houses as human, thus express an architectural vision of the full physical and psychological dimensions of their identity" (1987:139). Trying to comprehend what I had created in *Satisfaction Index*, I found that one of the reasons I felt deflated by some of the responses and non-responses was, that the production had a large part of me in it. It was personal on many levels. I was trying to carve out a new identity for myself. It was an attempt at expressing my choreographic choices and seeing how I could be different from the 'Jackie from Jazzart'<sup>4</sup> persona. I also made the decision to play all the roles of a creative team, that is, director, choreographer and performer all on my own, because I wanted the project to have my influence alone. Administrative duties were also my responsibility at least for the first installment of the production; afterwards I sought help. All of this had a straining effect both on my psychological and physical wellbeing. The way I saw

---

<sup>4</sup> This is how a percentage of the general public (artists) identified and referred to me.

it, the Batammaliba's systematic approach and the relation to human anatomy, as well as how they constructed their houses, could be a possible framework that I could utilise for thinking through and further understanding my production process. I sought to use this framework as an extension, a deepening, an unpacking of the chapters in the production - a first attempt at finding a way to articulate the essence of the dance piece I had created.

The Batammaliba are an agro-pastoralist people who reside in the mountainous region of

West Africa, with the Atakora mountains dominating this savanna region. Their language is Litammali.

Through my readings I have come across a variety of spellings of the name of this people, *Batammariba* or *Betammaribe*. Blier clears up some of this confusion. In her book she notes: "In the interest of correcting previous inaccuracies with regard to name and in following the current practice of African scholars to do so, this book uses the term Batammaliba" (1987:235). The book that I am referring to is, *The Anatomy of Architecture: Ontology and Metaphor in Batammaliba Architectural Expression*. An anatomical and metaphorical approach/application is what ignited my interest. Firstly, to expand on an anatomical approach, I look to Blier once again when she evidences that, "Each step of the construction process also parallels human development" (1987:119). A strain of anatomy, embryology, which is a study of human development and which Blier notes to be side by side with the steps of construction in the Batammaliba people, seems to be a possible perspective from which I could view from or engage with in my creation process. If I was to be honest to the process or journey that I was on, I needed to see myself, my rebranding as a soloist and the development of my choreography, as that of a new foetus. Understanding that human development can be a slow process, so can the development of one's career or desires.

On the metaphorical approach, I looked to Marimba Ani's chapter 'Utamawazo: Cultural

Structuring of Thought', in her book, *Yurugu*.

The African world-view and world-view of other people who are not of European origin, all appear to have certain themes in common. The universe to which they relate is sacred in its origin, is organic, and is a true "cosmos". Human beings are part of the cosmos, and as such, relate intimately with other cosmic beings. Knowledge of the universe comes through the relationship with it and through perception of spirit in matter. The universe is one; spheres are joined in because of a single unifying force that pervades all being. Meaningful reality issues from this force. These world-views are "reasonable" but not rationalistic: complex yet lived. They tend to be expressed through a logic of metaphor and complex symbolism. (Ani, 1994:29)

It was my aspiration to work with a theme whose creative design outlook was of human development and fostered by complex symbolism in the way that I think about and create my work. By this idea, I suggest a creative or choreographic approach that is guided by a sacred, expressive, organic freedom, laden by a complex use of symbolisms. The way in which the Batammaliba build their houses expanded my curiosity and set me on a new path.

The Batammaliba's earthen structures are multistory buildings.

Each house is positioned within a small, roughly circular, cleared yard (bupe, litowa). House size, generally varying from six to eighteen metres wide and deep and from four to five metres in height, belies the impressive grandeur that each of these structures convey. (Blier 1987:14)

It seems that the Batammaliba's architectural design was developed from a combination of the people that they encountered upon relocating to the Atakora region and was also a response to the necessity of space and defence. There are three groupings or classes of architects, the "master architect" (*otammalimwa*) is one who has, during their practice, completed ten or more buildings, with the two other classes being of lesser experience or at apprentice level. These architects are noted to be men whilst the women's role in the process of building has been in the decorative part of the building project. The women use



cicatrization whilst the plaster is still wet by making incisions with their fingers to create patterns on the surface around the door. A lance is used to regularly define these patterns. The house is then stained with a richly coloured fruit and water solution that gives it a deep maroon and brown finish that also protects the walls. The ritual of cicatrization was my initial attraction to the Batammaliba, cicatrization meaning to heal or become healed by the formation of scar tissue. The definition and action of this word speaks even more greatly to me now than it did four years ago. The second attraction was towards the architecture itself. Batammaliba translates as: “those who are the real architects of earth” (Blier, 1987: 2). Susan Blier in her book, writes: “Architecture, like history, is

invariably *anthropocentric*”. She continues:

Architecture is integrally identified with human activity, experience, and expression, for, in ordering space, architecture also orders human action. Architecture is concerned with not only different aspects of human life but also with the variant categories of human thought and expression. (1987: 2, emphasis in original)

At a superficial level of investigating these people, I frequently encountered their penis elongation as what they are most known for, taking away from their expertise as master builders. My resolve was to view them as, “those who are the real architects of earth” (Blier, 1987:3). This symbolism as creators of the earth speaks to me of the understanding of how in most African cultures you are one with nature. Most of the information that I have come across regarding the Batammaliba people’s architecture has been of splendour and admiration for their building expertise. This too is an aspiration for my work - to create splendour. In too many cases I have found that the representation of black women is synonymous with victimhood and pain and I consciously try to move away from these stereotypes. When I found out about how the Batammaliba architecture was constructed

with human anatomy in mind, I wanted to know more and see how I could use this method of construction to refine my own practice. This encouraged me to visualise the structure of my dance theatre in this format.

Through learning about the Batammaliba's architecture and as an attempt at emulating their approach, dividing the work into chapters or rooms seemed fit and prompted me to the thought that my practice and career required an 'ordering' of my space. In the years that I had been a company dancer with Jazzart, I had never really had to 'organise' my preferred style, as one works, or in our case worked, with an already existing but ever evolving choreographic style rooted in the company's identity. Once I had left the organisation, I did not have, at my disposal, input or a directive that affected my actions and choices choreographically. I then had to look to myself. As someone who was and is interested in establishing or defining their practice, architecture and building, or the process thereof, became a natural pathway to follow and to formulate my ideas or plans. It was in this instance that I sought to use architectural theories, critiques and observations of and on the Batammaliba, with the aim to 'deconstruct' my performance and creation practice, thereby 'building' a new equation to and of my dance theatre practice and performance. By 'deconstruct' I imply to analyse. By deconstructing, (read analysing) my practice, it became clear to me that I would not discover the person that I am developing to be if I am not willing to go through an act of death or dying with the aim of reconstructing myself and my work. The process thus, began with the curiosity of finding out my matrilineal ancestry.

I encountered this from Blier: "Although the Batammaliba are patrilocal and patrilineal, the matriline is maintained and is an important focus of religious ceremony" (Blier 1987:8). I am consciously choosing not to be too in-depth regarding the origins of this

people. The usage of metaphors in their architecture, as I have noted earlier, is what greatly interested my investigative process. German dramatist, Heiner Müller, found his experience of watching *Fantasia*, a Disney film, to be horrifying as the film prevented the use of imagination but instead, preoccupied itself with the prevention of experience/s by the reduction of metaphors to one meaning. This particular film meant for him that one could not exercise their ability to imagine. I believe that theatre or dance is an opportunity, a tool, to further spark both the creator's and spectator's imagination, to allow them to form new ideas, new equations. It is the Batammaliba's architectural metaphors, the form of using anatomy to inspire it, that has allowed me as a dance maker to be, firstly, inquisitive about these people and secondly, to develop a dance interest in how I relate to architecture. Would I be able to use their architecture to develop and define my dance theatre? As an aspirant *otammalimwa* of my performance practice or choreographic style (and being on an MA programme), I am inspired by these artists whose skill is seen as an ancestral gift and the importance of the women's role in the traditional rituals. My interest in the Batammaliba had me considering where my choreography came from. Besides using the improvisation technique to create performance material, where was it originating from on a more ancestral level? A thought to enquire about my genetic ancestry came into the equation. Could the genetic testing of my maternal ancestry lead me somewhere? When I improvise, where is my movement coming from? Would the quest of my matriline provide me with the answers that I am seeking as I delve into more ritualistically infused performances? I must be clear at this point, my usage of ritualistic performances is not about the appropriation of any culture but is an exploration of 'created rituals'. By created rituals I mean invented rituals. An explanation of this idea is contained in the quote below from Julia

Hartsell's website under the heading, *Ritual Dance*.

Ritual Dances combine improvisational movement, music and ritual technologies with a shared purpose. Dance is an ancient cross-cultural way of processing life's joys, sorrows and passages. Embodied, communal ritual gives greater access to emotions and allows the experience of them to be more cathartic and transformative. (Hartsell, 2014)

After years of undergoing profound experiences through dance, Julia Hartsell, a dancer, dance facilitator and "[...]an initiate of the of Osun in the Ifá/ Òrìsà tradition of Yoruba West Africa" (Hartsell, 2014), answered the call of working with ritual dance for her own healing.

Another example of a dance practitioner who sought to use dance and movement rituals to aid in healing is Anna Halprin, an American avant-garde pioneer. Shelley Kale, a publications and strategic projects manager at The California Historical Society quoted her in a press release for the society's exhibition called *Experiments in Environment: The Halprin*

*Workshops, 1966-1971*, as follows: "Before I had cancer I lived my life in service of dance, and after I had cancer, I danced in the service of life"- Anna Halprin (Kale, 2016). For some time now, I have been aware of the healing work that I have to undergo to reach a level of some comfort with myself, my work and my life in general. The pursuit of this degree, I hoped and imagined, would bring me closer to this healing. To a large degree it has.

Enquiring about my artistic voice or signature through this study has brought me closer to healing some of the wounds that I have encountered in my 40 years being on this earth.

Wishing to go beyond just the recent history and ancestral homes that I have been exposed to, I needed to go into my blood past. A mitochondrial genetic ancestry test would help me to geographically locate some of my ancestors in my bloodline. Which other people lived in this house? This house that is my body. This brought me to wanting to dance my DNA. "Each architect is seen to be the holder of a unique gift or talent inherited from a deceased family member who was also an architect" (Blier, 1987:22). My interests in these

people was once again stimulated by their connection to the spiritual world, giving me deeper insight into their ways of being. This way of being (connection with the ancestors), was an avenue that I have just begun to consciously entertain in my work. As I was, and still am learning about my ancestral heritage, these 'accidental' discoveries or coincidences are as if callings not to be ignored. During this process of finding focus in my learning, I am, in retrospect viewing my previous work and recognising that most, if not all of the work/s that I have created have been about healing, of myself or others, or of the environment that I would be working in.

Discovering the book, *Soul of Africa: Magical Rites and Traditions* (1999), was as if I had received a message from the ancestors. It came at a very late stage in the preparation of my Minor Project. It was an 'accidental' discovery. I was at a bookshop close to where I live, looking for anything to give me a spark for the first public performance of my research. Without any money, and as I was giving up, a title in red, *Soul of Africa*, shouted out from the bookshelf. Accompanied by an image of a half-covered grass face, I picked it up, it was heavy, I paged through it. The first page that I saw had a picture of a girl with white paint markings on her face, and there, on the second page, lay two, what looked like girls, with knives in their hands. I had to have it! In preparation for my Minor Project, I had included a knife as part of the instruments that I would use in the performance! I asked the bookseller to hold it for me. I ran home to get money to buy the book, telling my husband that this book belongs to me, it is a sign. The book presented me with images/ illustrations that spoke to work that I had created in 2013 and what I was planning to present for my MA Minor Project in March 2018. This discovery, both the book and the realisation of its message/s, I felt I could not ignore. It made me even more eager to come back to questions

that I have had swimming in my thinking since I embarked on an academic career: what is contemporary dance? What is my contemporary dance theatre?

Another conceptual framework that informs this research is that of *Sankofa*.

The “Sankofa” is a metaphorical symbol used by the Akan people of Ghana, generally depicted as a bird with its head turned backward taking an egg from its back. It expresses the importance of reaching back to knowledge gained in the past and bringing it into the present in order to make positive progress. (sankofa.org, 2017)

“Sankofa is an Akan (West African) word made up of three parts: *san* (“to return”), *ko* (“go back”) and *fa* (“fetch/retrieve”). It is a symbol and principle that serves to remind us that the past is a “resource” and not merely a “reference.” (Wilson, 2009: 587)

I translate the concept of Sankofa as: “It is not forbidden to go back to the past to fetch what you left behind and construct a future”. Throughout this journey I have had to engage with the exercise of looking back to where I come from in order to know where I am going. Helpful in the thinking around my choreography or movement during this process, the Sankofa principle provides me with a vessel to articulate the DNA of my choreography. I am working from the past, working in and from memory as I engage with movement for my creations. This act of remembering or retrieving from the past, from memory, is a way of coming to terms or engaging with my past. Within the movement, what I have experienced at times, is my body being inhabited, as if the movement is no longer coming from me but is coming from an unidentifiable entity. It is not easy to write about this experience as I have never really focused my attentions to it. It mainly happens when I am in performance. After the performance I am either too busy packing up or trying to bring myself back from the performance. I do though remember times or have memories where this feeling has occurred. A text by Rolando Vázquez, quoting Amanda Piña, on her dance, *The Jaguar and the Snake*, helps me to better understand this experience:

“Movement”, says Amanda Piña, “ is emergent, and ‘it does’ the mover [...] [it] is not an object [...] this ‘movement does me’ the dancer is moved executed by the movement [...] modified by the movement in tone, sensation and perception”[8]. (Vázquez, 2019)

This articulation of the experience of ‘movement doing a dancer’, and the dancer being altered, I relate to a form of possession. In this case, I would like to think of being possessed by memories or the past. What has come to light since engaging with this phenomenon, is to continue to educate myself with understanding and articulating these experiences to better form my overall expression of my artistic practice, and voice or signature. Being possessed by the past or memories is but only a part of the idea of the practice of Sankofa. What then happens after this newfound knowledge? When a dancer or person is modified, changed or altered? When living in a culture that is seemingly ‘civilised’, obsessed with make-overs, is invested in mind-altering substances and the constant need to refine personal identities, how does one exist? The need for some performance artists to be constantly representative of a culture, sub-culture and or group in their work is a tense affair for me. It is indicative of a way of thinking that is regressive. Though I tend to delve into characterisation (assuming a character) in my work, it is not an act of being representative of one particular culture, religion or people. It is an act of allowing something, some energy, some force, to inhabit my body to find expression.

Characterisation for me plays the role of a storytelling tool, hence my usage of it. It may sound like I am contradicting myself. Earlier I spoke of the representation of black women as victims and how I try to move away from this. As a counter response I move by, or operate in, a non-representational space. I find representation to be problematic when it is used to reinforce stereotypes. In the example of when a black woman is constantly portrayed as a victim, it only reinforces how others view her in her daily activities. I find the idea of

representation to be a structure that creates exclusivity rather than inclusivity. It is a structure that promotes or is built on creating 'others' of one another, a structure of colonisation. At this point in our time, my concern, especially for our country, is the danger of returning to a practice of demarcating peoples. A demarcation that could lead to tribalism. The separation of cultures, beliefs, genders and ethnicities, is a tool that works alongside, and for colonisation. To think through these concerns of representation, and to gain insight into such social phenomena, I seek guidance from

Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, in their book, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics and Praxis*:

Decoloniality denotes ways of thinking, knowing, being, and doing that began with, but also precede, the colonial enterprise and invasion. It implies the recognition and undoing of the hierarchical structures of race, gender, heteropatriarchy, and class that continue to control life, knowledge, spirituality, and thought, structures that are clearly intertwined with and constitutive of global capitalism and Western modernity. Moreover, it is indicative of the ongoing nature of struggles, constructions, and creations that continue to work within coloniality's margins and fissures to affirm that which coloniality attempted to negate. Decoloniality in this sense, is not a static condition, an individual attribute, or lineal point of arrival or enlightenment. Instead, decoloniality seeks to make visible, open up, and advance radically distinct perspectives and positionalities that displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis and thought. (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018: 17) Why have I put Decoloniality and Sankofa adjacently one may ask? I marry the two as part illustration of practicing as research within and for this section of the paper. By using this study as a ground for the discovery of new knowledge, new ways of thinking, I humbly attempt the dislocation of the Euro-American thought perspective of representation in favour of a remembering that allows the body through its practice to recover, reclaim and recollect things from the past that have laid dormant or been ignored or marginalised through the processes of coloniality. The act of representation is indicative of an idea and construct born of a Western capitalist framework that seeks to create divisions in its wake. It can be problematic if its roots are not identified. I would argue that if we view representation as being key to the articulation of our dance work, it is looking at it from the perspective of a Western, modern, colonial, rationality alone. The use of Sankofa is to present or offer another perspective, alternative



to this thinking. Sankofa, “describes an ongoing process, principle, and value of historical and cultural recovery” (Wilson, 2009:587). Decoloniality and Sankofa thus create a two-pronged approach to the re-shaping and reconstruction of my thinking. Dismantling a colonised thought process with an African principle presents me with an altered lens through which to view the elements of creation in my work.

Without the introduction to decoloniality, I would not have been able to frame what I have been feeling for a very long time but unable to articulate. I have been struggling to understand why, as humans we feel the need to limit our alternatives, to box ourselves, to be one dimensional. I do not wish to bind myself towards any one particular school of thought. I am forever searching; the outcome is not my end goal. The eclecticism that I am presenting in this dissertation is of a conscious thought and is not forced. It is meant to illustrate a greater, much bigger picture or idea. A new knowledge is always at our disposal if we are aware and can find positive ways of utilising it. We can use this knowledge to reshape, re-member, enlighten and engage in the act of undoing-deconstructing or the act of doing-constructing or re-constructing. When we create our work and we are open to knowledge, aware of the structures constructed to control our ways of thinking, being and behaving, then we stand a better chance of not upholding such structures, structures which are regressive. We begin to find new equations in the way we operate as a society.

Sankofa asks that we look back into our past/s. Decoloniality similarly asks us to reawaken our thinking to a time before coloniality, and both, to find new ways of thinking and being. These two concepts in the case of this study, speak to the quest of articulating my practice. To create an appreciation of where I currently stand as a ‘soloist under construction’, charting a way forward in determining her choreographic, performance and

artistic signature, I was directed down the path of tracing my dance DNA through the act of looking back.

In the upcoming sections I will focus my attention on my dance and performance journey. Part 1, *The Architecture of My Practice* is an investigation of the training that I have received to-date. An historical trek, from being a trainee, a company dancer, to a teacher, choreographer and artistic director at Jazzart Dance Theatre. Part 2, *Between Form and Freedom*, analyses solo productions and projects since I stepped down as artistic director of Jazzart Dance Theatre in 2014, including but not limited to, *Satisfaction Index*, and the analyses of works created for the Master's degree, my Minor Project, *Kala II*, my Medium Project and the One Person Show, *JOPS '19*. These productions were an exploration of my approach to choreography and improvised performance. In this instance, I would like to make a distinction between dance as a set of steps learnt and rehearsed and improvisation which is, in this case, not learnt and rehearsed but structured and performed. 'Form and Freedom', is a term that I have borrowed from the director, Mark Fleishman's, programme note for the production *Cold Waters/Thirsty Souls* (2002)<sup>5</sup>, in which the interaction between

---

3. *Cold Waters, Thirsty Souls* was a collaboration between Jazzart Dance Theatre and Magnet Theatre. It was first performed in the Main Theatre at Artscape in January 2002. The full quote from the Director's Note reads: "In past productions we used improvisation to generate dance material, which we have then refined, and set structure and improvisation is foregrounded. This was a production I performed in as a trainee at Jazzart.



Satisfaction Index at Greatmore, 2015. Image by Ariana Azzolini

---

and repeated in exactly the same way each performance. In this way the dancers were integrally involved in the making of the dance. In this production we took improvisation a step further, bringing it directly into the performance arena itself. *Cold Waters/Thirsty Souls* is a lively interplay between structure and improvisation; between form and freedom”.

## TRACING MY DANCE DNA

“Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end: then stop”  
(Lewis Carroll, 1865, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*)

The above quote somehow gives a summary to the process of this study. In the articulation exercise of my work, I found that I had to return to a/the beginning to reach an end where I am satisfied. After not being successful in doing a mitochondrial genetic ancestry test, I was obligated to do a different kind of test to find some answers. The test was that of my dance DNA, looking back into the training that I had received at Jazzart where I spent 14 years.

What I failed to notice at the time was that I could have gone back further, to my pre-school days, primary and high school as well. Since I can recall, I have always been deeply curious about science. Where do we come from and why am I here? Though the latter is more of a philosophical question it got me wondering about my existence on this earth. At some point in primary school I wanted to be a scientist. It was when a science experiment for a demonstration in class failed and was laughed at by my classmates, that I lost interest in the career. My high school biology and chemistry marks were disappointing to say the least and I discarded the idea of following in the steps of the world's great scientists. At the beginning of this research, I was brought back to biology in the form of DNA. I wanted to know where my improvised choreography came from - why did I move the way I did? What influenced my

artistic choices? Why was I interested in certain pieces of music? What is my dance DNA?

Chris Calladine *et al* define DNA - 'Deoxyribo-Nucleic Acid' a certain kind of acid found in the cell nucleus - as "...the most central substance in the workings of all life on Earth" (2004:x). They go on to explain that "... DNA contains the 'genes' of classical genetics - those units of inheritance which pass on characteristics such as red hair or a long nose from parent to child, or even crippling diseases such as sickle-cell anemia or thalassemia" (2004: xi). According to the U.S National Library of Medicine, "The Human Genome Project estimated that humans have between 20,000 and 25,000 genes" (NLM.gov, 2019). Calladine

*et al* note that, “DNA[...] was first identified over 100 years ago” (2004:xi). A hundred years ago does not seem that unimaginable. My maternal grandfather, Mr Barnabas Mokoto Nko, was born in 1903; that means DNA was first identified the year he was born! This information gives me hope that although I might not be able to find the genesis or the central most important part of my workings there is still time for this, my experiment.

After months of trying to convince my mother to allow me to dance post-high school, I thought the best way to getting around her “find a serious career” plea, would be to sell her the idea of going to a university to study the art of dance. I knew that we did not have the finances, but I was fresh out of ideas. After more lengthy conversations, she gave in to the idea upon my persuading her that I would be financially independent, that the industry is thriving (in fact, I had no idea what I was talking about). Her apprehension I somehow understood. There were no examples of professional dancers in my community. This was a time in which we were meant to be ‘Alive with Possibilities’. I thought I could conquer the world! I would learn to dance and become a famous dancer and choreographer (Janet Jackson was my inspiration). It was the 90s and I did not know of any dance schools, programmes or projects in Gugulethu. I decided to call the University of Cape Town’s Ballet School.

According to an article in the Humanities News:

UCT School of Dance, formally known as UCT Ballet School, celebrate[d] its 80th anniversary in 2014. The School was founded in 1934 by South African Prima Ballerina Dulcie Howes and initially formed part of the South African College of Music, headed by Professor WH (Daddy) Bell. [...] Although it is one of the smaller academic departments within the Faculty of Humanities, it is one of the most sought after dance training destinations on the continent. (University of Cape Town, 2014)

I was asked in the phone call if I had any previous dance training, specifically Cecchetti Ballet. My answer was no and that was the end of that call. I could not be accepted to UCT because of the lack of Cecchetti training. Before continuing, a brief explanation on Cecchetti from the Cecchetti Society of Southern Africa website:

The Cecchetti Method is a system of training in Classical Ballet designed strictly upon the laws of anatomy and stresses two essential ingredients - technical and artistic development in a dancer and a sensitive, musical response to all movements.

Cecchetti devised a balanced programme of study which ensures that every movement and step of repertoire required by the Dancer, is covered. It is an exact and meticulous system drawn up with careful regard for the laws of anatomy and is designed to furnish the body with all those qualities essential to the dancer.

These and other timeless Cecchetti Principles of Classical Dance are contained in The Method which imbues the Dancer with Simplicity of Style, Purity of Line, Balance, Poise, Strength, Elevation, Elasticity, Ballon and a notable Musicality and Theatricality. (Cecchetti Society of Southern Africa, 2019)

I should note that subsequently African and Contemporary Dance have been added into the curriculum at the university and have become more central. At the time I was seeking training, however, this was not the case and I had to go back to the drawing board. I remembered meeting a dance company during my high school career and I thought to contact them. In 1995, when I was in Standard Eight, now Grade Ten, I met some of Jazzart's dancers when I participated in a series of workshops called Musicactive<sup>5</sup>.

In January 1999, I gave Jazzart Dance Theatre a call. My call was answered by John Linden one of Jazzart's teachers and director of Dance Joint, Jazzart's evening classes, who asked me to come in for a conversation. Overjoyed, I made an appointment for the next day

---

<sup>5</sup> For *Musicactive*, Volkswagen recruits top practitioners to teach performing arts skills and students develop their talents in workshops and theatre productions (Durbanet, n.d.).

and we met. I will not go into details about our meeting other than to indicate that it was a

---

success. I was to join their Dance Joint evening classes which I packaged as 'night school' to my mother. In the same year, Alfred Hinkel walked into one of those classes and announced that they would be holding auditions later in the year for a training programme. Done, I am auditioning.

My affair with Jazzart, or the 'falling in love' with the organisation, was perhaps due to the fact that I was accepted to the institution without any prior professional dance experience. Whereas UCT Dance School did not or could not accept me because I lacked Cecchetti Ballet training, at Jazzart I was given an opportunity, identified as one who had some talent and could further skill myself in the art of dance. The acceptance of the 'untrained' body by the company, stems from the then artistic director, Alfred Hinkel's questioning of the classical ballet techniques that he was trained in at UCT, namely, Cecchetti Ballet.

Clare Dembovsky, in her MA research on the principles and practices of Jazzart Dance Theatre observes:

Jazzart's mission to work with a combination of all races and body types is addressed through training and performance, and presents an overt attack on the 'narcissism, exclusivity and disempowerment' of conventional dance and South Africa's socio- political reality. (1997:53)

To support her observation she quotes Jay Pather:

Dancers bodies are trapped in images and therefore by definition a lack of reality. In South Africa body images of dancers are all the more ridiculous than if you want Europe or America since the majority of the bodies in South Africa don't look like that anyway and why should they? Why are there so few black women contemporary and ballet dancers? What is it? What is it that has been created as a blueprint for body type and body movement that is so exclusive, that is so difficult to attain that so few actually fit this description? (Pather, 1991: 8 in Dembovsky, 1997:53)

It is in contradiction to, and out of the questioning of, the classical principles that Hinkel began training dancers from diverse dancing and cultural backgrounds. This training developed a way of working and/or training the body that we later understood to be the Jazzart method.

Classical training defies gravity whereas African Dance is more about the relationship one has with the earth and gravity. The erectness of the torso or body in classical ballet is in direct opposition to a more African Dance aesthetic and training. In the formative years of Jazzart Dance Theatre, classically trained dancers worked side by side with African traditional dancers and urban dancers. Dancers of traditional and urban upbringing were not recognised as being taught by 'qualified dance teachers' at the time and therefore received little to no recognition, which meant that their dances or choreographic languages were not acknowledged. The ancestral knowledges and expertise inherent in their bodies were not considered valuable or valid. This prompted the training at Jazzart to find a way of working with these dancers in a more democratic way. Instead of focusing on a Western aesthetic, Jazzart looked for a more African-based way of working, but not completely excluding the Western forms (Hinkel, personal communication 2019, 12 May).

The first official training programme at Jazzart, of which I am a graduate, was in 1999. It was called The Young Adult Training and Job Creation Programme. It is here where we were exposed to dance and performance training. This would happen in technique classes and through performing in musicals, operas and Jazzart productions. It also included teaching and facilitating workshops at various schools in collaboration with the Western Cape Education Department and Magnet Theatre. We also participated in outreach projects as performers and/or teachers both locally and nationally.



I choose to include my years as choreographer, teacher and artistic director in this reflection of my training as I strongly believe in the concept of an 'on-the-job-training' practice. The work takes on a form of life-long, on-going learning which I find to be an important aspect of deepening our work and practices. "On the job training has as its fundamental goal the improvement of the teaching-learning process" [and] "... on-the-job training in terms of a reality context contributes to the growth of individuals and their development as resourceful members of any organization" (Bagwandeem & Louw, 1993: 34). This definition of on-the-job-training is intended to give the reader a better picture into the scope of the training and as a result of that, the details of who or what I am as an artist. One of the aims of the training programme was to equip young people from disadvantaged socio- and political backgrounds with skills to be experts in their craft and to empower them with knowledge, thereby creating young people who contribute to the financial growth of their communities and themselves. This prompted us to be resourceful members of this organisation. Our growth as artists and contributing members of our society was, I believe, one of the positive results in the way that we were trained. The exposure to different components of work allowed for choice at the end of the three years. Some went on to be theatre directors, musicians, teachers and even civil engineers.

## Part 1. The Architecture of My Practice (Training at Jazzart Dance Theatre)

### 1.1 Technique classes and Improvisation

#### In the Morning... Technique

Every morning, starting at nine o'clock we had an hour and a half warm up class. A set of exercises were practised in which the muscles, tendons and joints would be taken care of.

These exercises were based on a ‘fall and recovery’ method as sometimes explained in more Western contexts. ‘Fall and recovery’ as a term is credited to Doris Humphrey, an American dancer and teacher. Tension and release of muscles and breath cycle were what Humphrey was interested in. At Jazzart, or per Alfred Hinkel’s exploration, it was about using the body in its most natural way. Added to the morning class were floor work exercises which were based on an understanding of how babies learn to walk. The crawling, sitting and getting up of babies, the way babies would fall but never seem to hurt themselves as the arms and legs would catch them or respond in a quick response manner. This was another way of experiencing working with the torso and pelvis, with the limbs responding. It was an attempt to encourage the dancer-in-training to strive to go back to how the human body was designed to move and then thereafter to work with an ‘extended naturalism’<sup>6</sup>. My comprehension of the term ‘extended naturalism’, is using the body in its most natural way with a sophisticated understanding of extension that allows for the body to find ways of expression. It is also a concept of extending the body that does not feel forced but is natural.

---

Alternating with these classes and simultaneously accompanying them was the Chair class – a class done entirely in chairs. This too was a staple. We would work with, among other things, understanding the use of the torso to get up and off the chair, pushing into the floor away from you with the feet and legs which encouraged an extension of the legs and arms. Pushing into the floor also reinforced the idea of a more African-centric approach as opposed to Classical ballet which trains the body to defy gravity. The Chair class was a

---

<sup>6</sup> Alfred Hinkel, former Artistic Director of Jazzart Dance Theatre, uses this term but is unclear when or where he came across the term. (A. Hinkel, personal communication 2019, 12 May)

method which was borrowed from The Alexander Technique. The Alexander Technique Express website defines the technique as, “[...] a way to feel better, and move in a more relaxed and comfortable way... the way nature intended” (Alexander Technique Express, 2018). The differently abled or trained bodies, once in a chair, could work together in a similar fashion, with no one person or group positioned above the other. Hierarchical structures were deconstructed as a result.

We were working on understanding our own bodies, their limitations and strengths. These classes were to refigure the body and train it to be a better storytelling tool. The classes were repetitive, ritualistic in the sense that, every morning we worked on what Hinkel calls ‘the nuts and bolts’, ‘not the actual dance’. This structure was to establish stability and to further entrench the African-centric or Jazzart approach to the training.

#### In the late Morning to Afternoon... Improvisation

“Improvisation is the dynamic daughter of dance, at times self-indulgent, at times concise and determined, but always developing and changing. She has a free spirit; she should be given free rein within wisely and flexibly set boundaries” (Blom & Chaplin, 1988: xi)

The second ingredient of the Jazzart training was improvisation. Improvising as a practice was highly valued as a form of further training the body. It supported and or complemented the ‘nuts and bolts’ technique classes that we received. I was 20, which is regarded late to start dance training; the body, muscles, joints are hardened, formed. A de-programming had to occur; the work necessitated it, as I *felt*. Or understood. Improvisation assisted immensely in my ‘de-programming’. By de-programming, I speak to a previously programmed bodymind; in this instance, meaning, whether you had training or not. The improvisation practices taught, worked against whatever preconceived ideas or thoughts you had about yourself and the world at large. Working against my hardened, formed body and mind took me a long time, but improvisation as a practice eased this crossing. The de-programming

was aided by a set of rituals within the improvisation sessions.

The first physical technique deployed in our improvisation sessions was that of running. Following each other around the room, stepping on the same foot, equal distance apart. Added to this would be a concentration exercise counting from one-four, one-six and one-eight. Leaving out a number after every second cycle until you are counting in silence and then bringing back the number one at a time until you have the whole set again.

For example:

1,2,3,4

1,2,3,4,5,6 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8

Repeat.

2,3,4,

2,3,4,5,6

2,3,4,5,6,7,8

Repeat, and so forth.

During the course of this exercise, one is aware of one's breathing, the rhythm set out by the running, the need to concentrate and work as a unit.



Kala, ICA Live Arts Festival, 2018 image by Xolani Tulumani

Richard Schechner explains that: “Rituals provide stability. They also help people accomplish change in their lives, transforming them from one status or identity to another” (Schechner, 2002:72). Running for what seemed like hours, creating a sense of rhythm, order and force would allow us to be on high alert. As Hinkel put it in our conversation, these ritual exercises or introducing people to improvisation allows for the brainwaves to change. The body and facial expression change and when these changes occur, it can be felt in the room. These improvisation skills were meant to stimulate the dancer to inhabit their bodies, find comfort and faith in their bodies and abilities. In this way of working, the dancers, in finding the movement or choreography, are not dictated to. Rather it is a negotiation between the dancer and facilitator of the session. This created a dancer or performer who was a thoughtful contributor to the choreography. On the other hand, as a choreographer, you

saw or found yourself as someone who is there in a structuring role. I refer to Dembovsky's study here:

Thus the notion of the single authoritarian choreographer, imposing steps and ideals on an unthinking subject-object, makes way for a joint decision process by a group, a/the community. It is this 'democratic process ... linked to a clearly definable political tradition emerging post-1976' (Fleishman, 1990:103) that categorises the choreographic methodology of the company. (Dembovsky, 1997:28) Because the body has a personality, its movement or choreography would be imbued by this personality and thereby the movement or choreography would have a different look and feel about it depending on who had contributed to its making. With improvisation one is constantly stepping into the unknown. This is not the case in most classical dance techniques such as ballet. The dancer is not asked to improvise around a set of principles or a range of exercises to illicit movement. They are instructed. A set or a number of steps is given to them to execute. As Hinkel offers: "With classical ballet, it doesn't matter who is dancing" (A. Hinkel, personal communication 2019, 12 May).

We improvised to, (1) tell our stories, (2) exercise the muscle to improvise, (3) inhabit and be comfortable in our bodies, and (4) generate choreographic material. The generation of choreography occurred within an attentive facilitated space to enable our entering into another state of being. At first engagement with an exercise you, as a trainee, had to already have centred, or focused yourself for the session ahead. No chatting to your fellow trainees, utmost concentration and engagement with the exercise and having a 'yes attitude' to the work were expected and required. A 'yes attitude' is an attitude of body and mind that does not negate nor reject what is offered or proposed to you or in the space. It is about acceptance in the broad sense of the word.

To enter into another state of being, rituals were practised during the improvisation sessions. These resulted in us experiencing a mild trance-like state that allowed us to transform thereby re-defining our identities, realities and bodies. According to Müller and Müller, “Trance (from Latin *transire*, to go over)” is:

A state of altered consciousness, resembling an hypnotic or sleeplike state. The expression “falling into a trance” describes a psychosomatic process by which a person becomes extremely receptive and gives way to internal as well external powers. The numerous methods of inducing a trance or easing the passage into the trance require psychological stimuli, and certain physical techniques, such as monotonous rhythmical drumming, dancing, breathing techniques (e.g. hyperventilation), and meditation or concentration exercises [...]. (Müller and Müller, 2000: 497)

The word monotonous in this definition is not appealing to me. I prefer repetitive, as monotonous has tedious, soul-destroying connotations (which was and is not the case with such work). The second aspect on ritual inducing trance that I quote below, is by no means meant to be contradictory to the one above. It is in fact to point out another aspect to this practice. The mild trance-like state that I refer to in this analysis is an altered state of being fostered by the ritual exercises deployed in our improvisation sessions. This *altered state* of being is a feeling or experience that I cannot fully articulate. I seek guidance from the book, *Remains of Ritual: Northern Gods in a Southern Land*:

We may call sleep to visit us, but, as with Dionysian frenzy and the dance of northern gods, the moment of its arrival is not under conscious control. I am suggesting that possession trance is somehow an extreme form of daydreaming or some kind of sleepwalking, but there is a resonance bringing us somewhat closer to an understanding of how someone entranced can be there and away at the same time. (Friedson, 2009:36)

As I seemed to have little or no control over my brain’s activity during these sessions, in line with the instructions and exercises provided to me by the one facilitating the improvisation

session, I was somehow in the room and also not. Physically in the space, spiritually not, perhaps. This state still occurs to me whilst performing. I must point out, however, that it is not *always* in an improvisational setting that it occurs.

In improvisation, body, mind and environment are connected in specific ways that differ from everyday consciousness. There is some evidence that the improvisational mode of cognition is a form of trance, or altered state of mind. (Lösel, 2019:41)

I have consciously omitted in my analyses, Contact Improvisation and Rhythm classes or training sessions, firstly, due to the desire to focus on my journey as a soloist, though I am well aware that this individual experience does not exist in isolation of a community. Secondly, for the reason of not having had the opportunity to practise these two areas of work in an individual capacity these past two years.

## 1.2 Productions



*Cold Waters/Thirsty Souls, 2001*

Productions were either mounted solely by Jazzart or in collaboration with other institutions such as Magnet Theatre under the direction of Mark Fleishman and Jennie Reznick. Magnet Theatre's vision as stated on their website reads as follows:



Magnet Theatre seeks to celebrate a spirit of theatrical research and to challenge participants in our activities, performers and audience, through experiences that shift bodies, assumptions, feelings, beliefs and understandings. We strive to be a moving force in the lives and minds of people in relation to changing local and global contexts. (Magnet Theatre, 2019).

Understanding that improvisation was not only a choreography generating tool but could also be a performance was an absolute mind shift for a first-year trainee like myself who was riddled with performance anxiety, insecurities about being a dancer and still learning to understand and trust my body. This shift occurred in 2001 when Jazzart collaborated with Magnet on both company's fifth co-production. The production, *Cold Waters/Thirsty Souls* was to be our first professional production as the cohort of trainees. Improvisation in performance was a new concept to grapple with and it required extreme focus and discipline. That improvisation was a strong element of the production did not mean that you could do as you pleased. A set of rules were established and a framework to abide by made this production one of the most challenging productions to perform for me at the time. I found that I wanted the freedom that improvisation brings with it. It was also challenging in that the choices we made, and those made for us, were not at all what I was expecting, meaning, I had a different idea as to the outcome of the work based on the exercises we did during the creation process. The exercises involved taking pictures of where we came from with a disposable camera - the technology itself was stimulating. Taking pictures of where we came from gave me the impression that the work would have much more of each individual's personal angle weaved into the storyline of the production. The use of music (some soundscapes generated by the cast), and certain styles of dance like hip-hop and street-dance that were workshopped in the creation process, did not fully develop to where my 20-year-old-self thought they should go. I must remind the reader that, firstly, I did not have much of an idea of what it meant to create a dance production and secondly, since the

creation of choreography was seen as a negotiated, democratic space it felt like we possessed the power to have a much greater influence in what would eventually make it onto stage choreographically. Not seeing myself as a *dancer* but more as a *performer* did not help my state of mind whilst working on the production. In my eyes, a dancer had long legs, could split easily, started training at the age of three.



*Kala* at the ICA Live Arts Festival, 2018 image

by Xolani Tulumani

A performer was me, twenty, no former dance training, a body that couldn't split, the feet didn't go over, a tight groin, in short, *ndiqinile*, I possess a difficult body. To top all of that, I did not play a prominent role in the production. There were numerous conversations with one of the choreographers in the production who patiently explained that all that I was experiencing with my body, with myself, the undervaluing, was really unfounded. What I discovered about this experience is exactly why we never faced mirrors whilst training in

class. We couldn't look on or to the outside to understand and feel what was going on, on the inside. You had to trust the process, learn to listen to the body to make the shifts that needed to occur. Through this experience and exercise I learnt a great deal about trust. Trusting process and whoever was standing in front guiding the process. For my performance in this production, I won an award for Most Promising Dancer in a Contemporary Style, which is absolutely mindboggling, in retrospect, judging by the way I was feeling during the performance. *Cold Waters/Thirsty Souls* had me in a state of confusion. In the first instance, here I was, performing a work that we had done a lot of research work for but did not always use the material which we had generated or in the way I envisaged we would. Secondly, the performance being of some rehearsed material but also open at times required you to be extra vigilant whilst performing as anything could happen. It is this structure of Form (rehearsed choreography) and Freedom (improvised sections and or choreography), that I am now able to use to understand the structure/s of my performance practice.

In the next section I will use the idea of being between Form and Freedom to analyse works I subsequently made in the aftermath of my time at Jazzart. This analysis includes works created prior to starting the research for this degree and works made as part of the research for the degree.



*Kala* at the ICA Live Arts Festival, 2018 image

by Xolani Tulumani

## Part 2. Between Form and Freedom: Analysis of solo dance performances and projects

Assembling the Minor Project at the beginning of 2018, led me to a planning and preparation formula rather than a rehearsing one. By this I mean that I constructed the frame of the event but did not create predetermined steps. I responded to the shape of the plan guided by the music and its unfolding, and it is here where I began to identify how this project differed from my previous dance training's performances and my first solo performance work. Another clear indication of the experimental creation space that I was in, was the audience participatory element that I wanted to include in the work. This space

further shaped the ritualistic colour or foundation in this brand of performance. In the Minor Project, I designated places on a clean white cloth on the floor for six members of the audience to build a work of art using an approach based on the notion of *ekphrasis*. Guy Cools, in his chapter in the book *The Practice of Dramaturgy: Working on Action in Performance*, writes, “The practice of ekphrasis is as an example of how in the history of art many works have been created as ‘translations’ of existing works, often in other disciplines and media” (Cools, 2017: 105). The decision to use this approach provided the freedom to further experiment with the idea of not only having a singular body on stage accompanied by music to create a performance, which had been an area of concern when I created *Satisfaction Index* and when I viewed other dancemaker’s works which had a type of minimalist approach or aesthetic to them. The props or objects used in my project had a much more specific intention and could be translated as a set of symbolisms. The participation of the audience to help create the performance had a more tangible outcome in the form of the artwork produced on the cloth. Objects or props available to the audience for use were paints, beads, coins, glue, paper, scissors, chalk, water and candles. I was once again pulled into the ritual world by a suggestion by Mbongeni Mtshali, a lecturer at the University of Cape Town’s Centre for Theatre, Performance and Dance Studies, at the viewing of my first installment of my Minor Project, to read up on *Santeria*. Santeria has Caribbean and West African origins and is described as a syncretic religious practice comprising of Catholicism and Yoruba religion. I was pleasantly surprised and equally baffled by how, though I had no knowledge of this belief system or practice, my work contained some elements of it. In this instance, it was the use of scent and paraphernalia in my performance. The other puzzling discovery was Santeria’s links to Togo and Benin which fueled or solidified my enquiry

with the curiosity that I have towards the Batammaliba.

Syncretism in my dance plays an important role in achieving the accessibility of the dance. The amalgamation of different dance styles and music makes for a far more interesting creation in my process. Music for the Minor Project performance was carefully selected from my performance archive, with new tracks up for experimentation. Moments (an instrument, voice or beat) or verses in the tracks were identified and demarcated for particular use choreographically. The all-white costume was greatly influenced by the images I had come across from the book, *Soul of Africa*, and my previous work, *SEYA* (an all-female cast dance work created in 2013 at Jazzart, in honour of women), with the intention to recall one who was in a cleansing ritual. In this cleansing ritual, I experimented with using water with rose petals to further signify the cleansing. The water was then poured onto the cloth contributing to the audience members' creation. The Minor Project performance encouraged room for experimentation within my dance theatre explorations. It raised questions around ritual practice within performance. These questions and ones posed earlier, I would then further explore at the ICA Live Arts Festival in September of 2018.

Since the time of creating the Minor Project and the ICA Live Arts Festival in 2018, I have avoided using the term 'a performance', understood in the arts as 'putting on a show', or referring to the 'audience' as 'theatre-goers'. I wanted to treat the works as ceremonies, events or a ritual that I was conducting with the assistance of the dancers (guides or aides as I will refer to them from hereon) and the participants (the so-called audience).

The ICA Live Arts Festival was an encouragement to distill the event. I requested the assistance of aides for the event so as to allow me room for play. "Encourage a variety of

experiences which may jolt the group out of the usual and stretch not only their responses but their definition of dance improv itself” (Blom & Chaplin, 1988:114). Though Blom and Chaplin are referring to a group improvisation, one can apply the same principle to a soloist. To both challenge myself, and in response to what I learnt from the Minor Project, I wanted the space to experiment with the ideas and or findings, and I wanted to explore them at the festival’s event. Some of what I gathered from these observations was: (1) It felt as though I was running around without any focus; (2) The participants needed dedicated guidance to work on the cloth as they were also easily distracted by my presence around the room, and (3) I sincerely wanted to strengthen my dual role, that of being the one undergoing a ceremony and one who was leading it.

The Medium Project, *Kala*, at the end of 2018, was a dedicated exploration of the rooms concept expressed in Batammaliba architecture. I wanted the work to articulate or identify the rooms in the Batammaliba house as well as in my body and practice. As mentioned earlier in the conceptual frameworks section of the paper, the Batammaliba’s axiom, ‘Houses are Humans’, continued to feature strongly in my research and it was in the Medium Project where I thought and felt to manifest it in the event. Travelling around the campuses’ rooms, I marked each of the rooms that I was travelling to with the aides and participants as a body part. What I had learnt from both the Minor and ICA festival projects or events is that whilst I was creating experiences, events or moments, not ‘a performance’, audience participation was integral to the iterations. A sense of ritual was prominent in the works, and “Those in the ritual are all treated equally, reinforcing a sense of ‘we are all in this together’” (Schechner, 2002:63).

In each of these events or ceremonies the participants all have a role to play. They are not mere spectators; they are witnesses and aides in the process. Working together in these events allowed me time to focus on a spiritual journey rather than it being a spectacle. Since I did not have what I would call a standard method of constructing the work i.e. arrival at concept, choreographing the movement, rehearsing it and then performing it, I observed that the choice/s I made of planning, preparing, talking through the work with the aides, required that I be fully immersed in the action of the time in order to improvise, allowing my body and spirit to journey into the work.

The work could not be rehearsed for these reasons: I wanted to experiment with the idea of a non-rehearsed work or “rehearsing mentally”; the absence of audience as they had a role to play as participants; the cloth which was to be adorned by the participants needed to remain untouched, clean during rehearsals and due to the scarcity of funds, a new one could not be bought. The choice of a non-rehearsed work kept the unpredictability, the risk factor of the ceremony alive for both myself and the participants. I also needed the space to explore and experiment with these ideas through improvisation during the ritual. As Blom and Chaplin note: “To improvise is to participate in the creative process and bring form to the impulses of the body and spirit” (1988:28).

What I learnt from the Minor Project allowed me to further understand, experiment and deepen certain ideas for the Medium Project event. The external impulse, music, played an important role as it held the work together. The work had a substantial amount of improvisation and it was important to me to make it clear to the aides that we were not to do as we wished but what was needed by the event and what we had planned. Pointers or markers in the different pieces of music were our navigators and they kept us under control. This sonic stimulus was an element that I utilised to further focus myself into what was



happening and carving a way of presenting dance. Sometimes dance is not graceful, responding to impulses both internal and external can transport the spirit to other worlds or put one into a mild trance-like state which itself produces another layer of movement or dance that is set deep within the body of the performer, in my case the being, making it aesthetically difficult to watch. I choose the word 'being' rather than performer or dancer for identity purposes as I sense inhabiting many beings during the ceremony and do not wish to limit this experience. The space/s, and how I chose to use them, I would like to assume, affected the participants and their engagement with the work, thereby inducing them to sink further into the work. Based on audience engagement and performers' feedback, the overall response both from the aides and the participants of the work was positive. On reflection, they felt the work was sincere, ritualistic, honest and captivating. In the planning stages of the work, in conversation with the aides, I identified and allocated the rooms anatomically. I also realised that everything had to have a dual role or meaning. We were all interchangeable within this event or ceremony. Where the work had originated, The Playroom at Hiddingh campus, became the *heart* of the event. I chose it as a heart for the reason that it was the life source of this event and would, like the heart, pump blood (the participants, aides and I), to the rest of the body - in this case the campus. Travelling out of the *heart*, we went into the Commerce Building where, at the point where one of the aides threw petals on me, I went through a transformation in presence that would prepare me for entering the *vagina*, The Rehearsal Studio, *the women's room*. In this room, a few minutes into the song, one of the aides escorted the men out and I was left with the women performing a cleansing ceremony on me by wiping me down with a cloth. We then leave the *vagina* through the back door heading down the fire escape. The men having been downstairs were preparing the space for us, the women, for the final part of the event.

Internally, the conversation occurring in my head is that we were now entering the *brain* of this event. The brain is where I was burning papers, minutes of meetings, letters addressed to me and others from the time that I was at Jazzart, with the aim of releasing hurtful, angering and frustrating moments in my tenure as artistic director. The event ended in a symbolic death with my body being wrapped in a similar white cloth to that which was used in the *heart* and carried off by the aides. I came back to signify the end by extinguishing the fire and bowing. In retrospect, I should not have come back, though one of the participants saw this as an act of arising from the dead.

Throughout this whole event, ritual, architecture and improvisation informed the content/s of each of

the spaces both architecturally, symbolically and in terms of my emotional journey

In the One Person Show or as I titled it *JOPS'19*, at the start of 2019, I chose a different method of presentation. I worked the production in a conventional theatre. My plan was to create a work that would not have participants, to give myself time to notice the difference/s between doing so and not within my work. I also worked at an idea of ignoring the fact that I had an audience and marking the space as a private world. This was contrasted with the idea of using mirrors where I was watching myself, having a sense of being watched, and watching the watchers. This also represents the selfreflexive process of PaR. The attempt to become aware of what is going on in the act of making/performing. The acts of cleaning, dusting and organising were where I drew the movement language from. The development of this language saw me working with the technique I was trained in. I did not use any of the technology that comes with theatre except for pre-recorded sound which I operated myself. Upon reflection on this work, I observed yet again the elements of ritual, in the repetition of going up and down the stairs to operate the sound, and improvisation in

the construction of the scenes. I could have made the choice to link the tracks, work off a programme where songs would be on a continuous playlist, but I wanted to also reflect my lived experience of teaching in the same venue where I have to run up and down the stairs to control the music. I also wanted to remain in the scope of my research and that is why I played around with constructing and deconstructing the performance space. *The Invisible Actor* by Yoshi Oida and Lorna Marshall, provided insight when I could not find the development of the piece and my work in general.

The process of development might take the form of enlargement, reduction, or transformation, but it is always development. Not just 'change'. When you impose 'change' on a scene, this is acting from the head, it doesn't come from your organic sense of time and space. And the audience can sense the difference. (Oida & Marshall, 1997:35)

Working with this newfound knowledge helped me to understand and be comfortable with the

dynamics of development and change.

Post *JOPS'19* I was left empty, confused, directionless regarding the next development of my

research. I am still asking myself the question, 'why?'. It could be that as I was working on the project it became such an intellectual exercise that I could not make sense of the two-way pull in my mental and physical space. I went back to the original direction of the Minor Project where a book on magical rites and traditions called to me at a bookshop four days before I was to present my research in practice. This emptiness, confusion, lack of direction I will attempt to respond to via the plan towards my Final

Thesis Production, proposed in the next section and the conclusion.

## LAST SECTION - NEW EQUATIONS

The title of the opening chapter, '*Desire shapes space, and space shapes desires*, in Rowan Moore's book, *Why We Build*, offered me a sign to continue looking into architecture and confirmed that my encounter with all that I have discussed above, including the Batammaliba, was not an accident. He explains:

Architecture starts with desire on the part of its makers, whether for security, or grandeur, or shelter, or rootedness. Built, it influences the emotions of those who experience and use it, whose desires continue to shape and change it. Desire and emotions are overlapping concepts, but if 'desire' is active, directed towards real and imagined ends, and if 'emotion' implies greater passivity, describing the ways in which we are moved, architecture is engaged with both. Buildings are intermediaries in the reciprocation between hopes and intentions of people, in the present and the past. They are the mineral interval between the thoughts and actions that make them and the thoughts and actions that inhabit them. [...] Most people know that buildings are not purely functional, that there is an intangible something about them that has to do with emotion. (Moore, 2012:18)

The desire to articulate my artistic practice, voice or signature as a soloist stems from the need to feel grounded in my work. If architecture can be viewed as something both tangible and intangible, signifies both sentiment and aspiration, it is befitting for this exercise that I am currently undergoing. I *want* the confidence that comes with the expression of my artistic signature and I *long* to be articulate in this praxis.

The Thesis Production will then be an event that will operate, primarily between Form and Freedom. Form being set or rehearsed pieces, with Freedom being improvisation. To a great degree, this production will incorporate autoethnography, Practice and Performance as Research, DNA, the Batammaliba's metaphoric and anatomical architecture, Sankofa, ritual, supported by an attempt to trace each of the performance venues' histories as an anchor for the re-membling of myself within performance and not as a representation of the venue or architecture in a site-specific manner. I purposefully choose not to align or define the event as site-

specific based on the non-representational stance that I am interested in. In this instance, I am far more captivated by what Oida and Marshall write in *An Actor Adrift*: “It isn’t easy to make a marriage between mental concepts and physical sensations” (Oida & Marshall, 1992:18). I have chosen to begin this travelling event on the pavement in front of what is known as the Palm Tree Mosque, on Long Street, Cape Town. The next stop on the journey will be Marvel Bar also on 236 Long Street. Within these two venues I am looking into spaces being places of worship. The journey will end up at Hiddingh Campus with two events staged in two separate venues. The Palm Tree Mosque was not originally built as a mosque but a house, and where the two palms are situated, on the pavement, was part of the garden of the house. It is with this in mind, the tracing of each of the venue’s DNA, that will be my starting point. The wedlock of a mental concept

(the history of the venue as a garden) and a physical sensation (being on a pavement in Long Street), will be the driver for the analyses of each of the venues that I will be ‘performing’ in and around. I have put the word performing in inverted commas since I wish to be in a non-performance state when I am in these events. This too speaks to an autoethnographical approach. Reed-Danahay offers that, “For the most part, autoethnography has been assumed more ‘authentic’ than straight ethnography. The voice of the insider is assumed to be more true than that of the outsider in much current debate” (Reed-Danahay, 1997:3). The need to stay within the truth of my investigation, the contents of the event, and its presentation will be what grounds me during this production. The desire to remain truthful to every single layer in and of the event, is paramount.

It was this desire to create or define my dance theatre that drove me to embark on an academic career and to find ways of crystallising my practice or finding a rootedness through using the Batammaliba people’s architectural practices as a guide. The definition of my practice is then but an intermediary to finding a connection between my present, past

and future in the journey of rebranding myself as a soloist. The intangibility aspect of this quest is what is supplying power to and on this journey. The possibility of not arriving at a conclusive destination makes it both vexing and exhilarating. I find solace in Derrida's deconstruction. In Caputo's words, "Deconstruction is the relentless pursuit of *the* impossible, which means, of things whose possibility is sustained by their impossibility, of things which, instead of being wiped out by their impossibility, are actually nourished and fed by it"(1997:32). What supplies power to this journey is the understanding that I may not reach a destination, thereby making the trek exhilarating in that, there will always be room/s as spaces of stimulation. As I have mentioned earlier, music plays a vital role in my creations. To continue threading the written explication to the 'performance', in the first part of the event, to be held in Long Street, I will use the city's soundscape as my music. I made this decision for two reasons: firstly, I prefer a low-tech approach to my events, in terms of sound systems, projectors and machinery and secondly, to tie in with the idea of being a native of this city by immersing myself into the city's movements and sounds. Responding to the life of the city gives me more freedom to be in a world of remembrance, a world of memory. I was, in my younger days, always fascinated by the idea of being 'in town', whether at night or in the day. In all honesty, a part of me is still fascinated and I would like to know why. Through moving around in the busy street making my way towards Hiddingh campus, I wish to be able to, at the very least find certain answers to this question. Could the reason be that I was born at the Peninsula Maternity Hospital, District Six, which was also the Artscape Wardrobe, PMH, where we would go for fittings in the early days at Jazzart? Is it the production *Cargo* (2007) where we learnt about the history of our city and slavery that fascinates me? Or is it the diversity of the city and its famous street that grabs my attention? By placing architectural design and other concepts mentioned earlier, at the

centre of my investigation and using them to guide the coherence of my thinking, and with my intention or desire to build a framework that seeks to be representative of a new equation of expression in dance theatre, I have been lead down paths unpredicted in this two-year journey of my MA.

## CONCLUSION

This desire within me to arrive at New Equations might not occur. In the deconstruction (analysing, reducing and chasing the unimaginable) what may come out from this exercise is perhaps more questions, more areas to investigate. The inconclusiveness of this study is not to be viewed as a non-achievement, but an opening for further enquiry into my way of working. Through the last presentation of my research in performance, I wish to uncover even more mysteries in my creations. Before this journey, I did not realise the secrets held in *Satisfaction Index*. I thought I was just working off instinct only to realise that my work, choreographically, came from a place of deep knowing and that my actions were supported by an ancestral knowledge unbeknownst to me. As I chart forth on this trek, I have gained insight in understanding where to start each creation, performance or event, and the start is from a place of the deconstruction of my affairs with the aim of reaching a new knowledge and equation. As I trudge along with this newfound knowledge, I have travelled to a space of healing. Though this study may be inconclusive, I am comfortable to say that through this investigation or exercise, I am slowly gaining a better understanding of who I am - as a mother, artist, partner, daughter and friend.



Satisfaction Index at Artscape 2015

## REFERENCES

Adams, T.E., Holman Jones, S., Ellis, C. 2015. *Autoethnography: Understanding Qualitative Research*.



New York: Oxford University Press.

Alexander Technique Express, 2018. Complete Guide to the Alexander Technique. Available:

<https://www.alexandertechnique.com/> [2019, September 24].

Ani, M. 1994. *Yurugu: An African-centred Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behaviour*. New Jersey and Eritrea: Africa World Press.

Bagwandeen, D., & Louw, W. 1993. *In-Service Education and Training for Teachers in South Africa*. Pretoria: J.L. van Schaik Publishers.

Baxter, V. Practice as Research in South Africa. In *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistance*. Nelson, R. Ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 163-174.

Blier, S. 1987. *The Anatomy of Architecture: Ontology and Metaphor in Batammaliba Architectural Expression*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Blom, L., & Chaplin, T. 1988. *The Moment of Movement: Dance Improvisation*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Borgdorff, H. 2011. The Production of Knowledge in Artistic Research. *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*. Biggs, M., Karlsson, H. London and New York: Routledge. 44-63.

Calladine, C.R., Drew, H. R., Luisi, B.F. & Travers, A. A. 2004. *Understanding DNA: The Molecule and How It Works*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Elsevier Academic Press.

Caputo, J. 1997. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Cecchetti Society of Southern Africa. 2019. What is the Cecchetti Method of Training? Available: <http://www.cecchetti.co.za/information.html> [2019, September 21].

Cools, G. 2017. Correspondence and Ekphrasis. In *The Practice of Dramaturgy: Working on Actions in Performance*. Georgelou, K., Protopapa, E. & Theodoridou, D. Eds. Amsterdam and New York: Valiz. 99-108.

Dembovsky, C. 1997. *Jazzart Dance Theatre: Dance, Identity and Empowerment in a Changing South Africa*. MA dissertation. University of Surrey.

Durbanet. n.d. Volkswagen Music. Available:

<https://www.durbanet.co.za/darts/dart9604/music.htm> [Accessed: 2019, September 21].

- Ellis, C., Adams, T.E., & Bochner, A.P. 2011. Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical Social Research*, 36(4):273-290.
- Fassie, T.K. 2014. No. 26 Makana Square, Langa, Kapa: Before and After the Baby was Born. *I'm Not Your Weekend Special: Portraits on the Life+ Style & Politics of Brenda Fassie*. Madondo, B. Ed. South Africa: Pan Macmillan. 42-55.
- Friedson, S. 2009. *Remains of ritual: Northern Gods in a Southern Land*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Glaserfeld von, E. 1995. *Radical Constructivism: A Way of Knowing and Learning*. London and Washington, D.C: The Falmer Press.
- Hartsell, J. 2014. *Ritual Dance*. Available: <http://juliahartsell.com/ritual-dance/> [2019, September 21].
- Hodge, S. 2011. *50 Art Ideas You Really Need to Know*. London: Quercus.
- Jamal, A. 2015. Constant craving. *Sunday Times Lifestyle Magazine* (Sunday Times Combined Metros). 5 - 7 October: 5.
- Kale, S. 2016. *Anna Halprin: Dance as a Healing Art*. Experiments in Environment: The Halprin Workshops 1966 -1971. Available at: <https://experiments.californiahistoricalsociety.org/anna-halprin-dance-as-a-healing-art/> [2019, September 24].
- Lösel, G. 2019. The Improviser's Lazy Brain: Improvisation and cognition. In *The Routledge Companion to Theatre, Performance and Cognitive Science*. Kemp, R., & McConachie, B. Eds. London and New York: Routledge. 29-47.
- Magnet Theatre. 2019. Productions. Available: <https://magnettheatre.co.za/productions/coldwaters-thirsty-souls/> [2019, September 21].
- Mignolo, W.D., & Walsh, C.E. 2018. *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Moore, R. 2012. *Why We Build*. London, Basingstoke & Oxford: Picador.
- Müller, K., & Müller, U. 2000. *Soul of Africa: Magical Rites and Traditions*. Cologne: Könnemann Verlagsgesellschaft mbH.

- Nealon, J., & Giroux, S. 2002. *The Theory Toolbox: Critical Concepts for the Humanities, Arts, & Social Sciences* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
- Nelson, R. Ed. 2013. *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Oida, Y., & Marshall, L. 1992. *An Actor Adrift*. London: Methuen.
- Oida, Y., & Marshall, L. 1997. *The Invisible Actor*. London: Methuen.
- Reed-Danahay, D. E. Ed. 1997. *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social*. Oxford and New York: Berg.
- Sankofa.org. 2017. Available: <https://www.sankofa.org/mission> [2019 September 24].
- Saunders, T. 2015. Launch of 'New Voices' developmental programme. *Cape Times*. [online] 20 October. Available at: <https://www.iol.co.za/capetimes/arts-portal/stage/launch-of-newvoices-developmental-programme-1933132> [2018, August 24].
- Svensson, B. 1997. The Power of Biography: Criminal Policy, Prison Life, and the Formation of Criminal Identities in the Swedish State. In *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social*. Reed-Danahay, D. E. Ed. Oxford and New York: Berg. 71-103.
- Schechner, R. 2002. *Performance Studies: An introduction*. London and New York: Routledge.
- University of Cape Town. 2014. UCT School of Dance, 80 years on. *Faculty of Humanities News*: 1 July. Available: <http://www.humanities.uct.ac.za/news/uct-school-dance-80-years> [2019, September 21].
- U.S. National Library of Medicine. 2019. What is a gene? - *Genetics Home Reference* - NIH. Available: <https://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/primer/basics/gene> [2019, September 24].
- Vázquez, R. 2019. Precedence, Dance and the Contemporary - Tanzquartier Wien. *TQW Magazin*: 30 April. Available: <https://tqw.at/en/precedence-dance-and-the-contemporary/> [2019, September 22].
- Wilson, K.A. 2009. Sankofa, Concept. In *Encyclopedia of African Religion*. Asante, M.K. & Mazama, A. Eds. California: SAGE Publication Inc.
- Williams, R. 1983. *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society*. London: Fontana Paperbacks.

